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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 MANILA 000830

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DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, INR/EAP, DRL/CRA, DS, CA

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PINR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: SITREP 1: MALACANANG DECLARES "STATE OF EMERGENCY"

REF: MANILA - OPS CENTER 02/24/2006 TELECON

Classified By: Charge d'Affairs, a.i., Paul W. Jones for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: President Arroyo declared a "State of Emergency" in a TV address at 1120 hrs (local). Arroyo's formal proclamation of national emergency blamed a conspiracy between the "extreme Left" and "military adventurists." Based on Mission information, there does appear to have been some sort of plot and at least one high-level officer is reportedly in military custody; two others have now been apparently cleared. The military hierarchy has publicly reiterated its loyalty to Malacanang and confirmed that all units and commanders are "intact." There are no reports of unauthorized troop movements. At least two Opposition rallies have taken place, although Malacanang reportedly has now revoked all existing permits for the 20th anniversary of People Power (EDSA 1). There are no reports of problems for Amcits. Mission will hold another EAC at 1400 hrs local to review issuance of a Warden message and other matters. Mission has used press guidance provided by EAP with media and political contacts and anticipates issuance of a statement by late afternoon, following a private meeting that National Security Adviser Gonzales requested with Charge and a subsequent briefing by Foreign Secretary Romulo for the diplomatic corps planned for 4:00 pm. End Summary.

12. (U) President Arroyo declared a "State of Emergency" in a TV address at 1120 hrs (local). In her official proclamation (no. 1017), Arroyo stated that "military adventurists from the "extreme Right" and "authoritarians of the extreme Left represented by the NDF-CPP-NPA" had been conspiring for months to bring down the government, aided by "certain segments of the national media" had "recklessly magnified" their claims against the Government. Arroyo stated that a plot had been "foiled" and added that the military chain of command remained loyal to her. She gave no indication of how long Emergency Rule might last. Her proclamation invoked Presidential powers under Article 7, Section 18 of the 1987 Constitution in cases of insurrection or rebellion.

13. (C) Speaker of the House Jose De Venecia called Charge at mid-day. JDV said he supported the move by Arroyo, stating that he had been at meetings at Malacanang since 3 am on February 24. He characterized Arroyo's actions as a "mild, calibrated response" to a serious threat. He highlighted that the declaration does not impose martial law or suspend habeas corpus. He argued that the alternative to Malacanang taking action was to allow "a military junta" to take over. Regarding Emergency Rule powers, he said the president now has the authority to take over "public utilities," including

media outlets that are deemed to be engaged in "treason." He said civilians would not be arrested on mere "suspicion," but any such arrest would need evidence and a warrant. Military members involved in the plot would be punished using the code of military justice.

¶4. (C) Based on Mission information, there does appear to have been some sort of plot and at least one high-level officers is reportedly in military custody. Philippine National Police (PNP) Director of Operations Avelino Razon told poloff:

-- Several Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and police officers attempted to recruit other senior officers for a coup d'etat;

-- BG Danny Lim, Commander of the Scout Rangers, Colonel Ariel Querubin, Commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, and BG Marcellino Franco, commander of the PNP Special Action Force (SAF) are now in "restrictive custody" (note: in a subsequent presscon, AFP Chief of Staff General Generosa Senga indicated that Querubin and Franco were not, indeed, in custody, although they may face questioning);

-- Razon said he had no concerns about the SAF as a unit, but had relieved its entire command group;

-- The AFP and police are "consolidating and doing headcounts," Razon stated, claiming, "Things are under control now. We nipped something in the recruitment stage."

¶5. (C) NCIS contacts in the Philippine Marines stated that Colonel Querubin, Commander of the 1st Marine Brigade, approached Philippine Marine Commandant General Miranda the

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evening of February 23 seeking his support for an attempted coup. Philippine Navy Fleet Officer in Command Admiral Mayuga and Philippine Army Commander LTG Esperon intervened to keep units loyal.

¶6. (C) Just after 6 am February 24, National Security Advisor Norberto Gonzales phoned Charge to inform him that President Arroyo had approved a draft declaration of a State of Emergency. According to Gonzales, the measures would be similar to the measures President Arroyo imposed in May 2001 in response to violent anti-Arroyo demonstrations. (Note: The May 2001 measures lasted about one week, during which the GRP made some arrests without warrant -- though most suspects were released within a few weeks. End Note.) Gonzales said Emergency Rule would initially apply to the whole country, but would be refined "in a day or so." He indicated that the government planned to arrest members of the military and civilians involved in the plot. Gonzales asserted that the measures taken by the President are permitted by the Philippine Constitution. (Note: Article VII Section 18 of the Constitution states, "The President shall be the Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces of the Philippines and whenever it becomes necessary, he may call out such armed forces to prevent or suppress lawless violence, invasion or rebellion." Article XII, Section 17 of the Constitution adds, "In times of national emergency, when the public interest so requires, the State may, during the emergency and under reasonable terms prescribed by it, temporarily take over or direct the operation of any privately-owned public utility or business affected with public interest." End Note.)

¶7. (U) At least two Opposition rallies took place by mid-day, although PNP began to break them up by 1300 hrs based on revocation by Malacanang of permits for all EDSA-1 20th anniversary rallies. In one of the ongoing rallies, a small group of Opposition protesters mixed with some leftist elements are gathered near the "EDSA" Shrine, located in Metro Manila, and astride EDSA, a major thoroughfare. Some Opposition elements are also gathered at a hospital in the

San Juan area of metro Manila where former president Joseph Estrada is scheduled to undergo surgery later today. Estrada, who faces serious corruption charges, is normally under house arrest in the Manila suburb of Tanay. So far, these two rallies have basically been peaceful, though there are reports that the police may move in to break up the EDSA Shrine event. Earlier in the day, authorities revoked all permits for rallies in Quezon City. There are reports that other Opposition events are planned for later today, including that former president Corazon Aquino plans to lead an Opposition march on Roxas Boulevard in the Manila area. Despite the Emergency Rule declaration, Opposition figures have stated that they will push through with the planned rallies.

18. (U) In separate noontime press conferences at Malacanang and Camp Aguinaldo, Cabinet members and all service commanders reiterated their support for the President and the emergency measures. There was some inconclusive discussion of the need to protect "public utilities," an apparent reference to the media.

19. (U) The overall situation in Manila is calm as of 1400 local. Businesses are open and there is vehicular and foot traffic. There is not a large-scale military/police presence, although there is an increased deployment of military forces near the airport, near Malacanang, and at military locations in the city. Schools were closed during the morning and there are reports that some government offices have been closed.

10 (C) There are no reports of problems for Amcits. Mission will hold another EAC at 1400 hrs (local) to review issuance of a Warden message and other matters. Mission has used press guidance provided by EAP with media and political contacts and anticipates issuing a statement later this afternoon, following a private meeting between CDA and NSA Gonzales, followed by a briefing by Foreign Secretary Romulo to the diplomatic corps planned for 4:00 pm.

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